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1 The Concept of Culture Caught in a Web of Contradictions

A survey of current publications about the relations between sustainability and culture shows many of the texts referring to one of the three levels or subjects listed below:

- *Firstly*, an interesting debate about the concept of culture can be found in cultural studies, but also in a variety of other disciplines (cf. especially Hauser/Banse 2009).
- *Secondly*, treatments of the concept of culture can be found under various perspectives of sustainability (cf. e.g. Kopfmüller 2009; Parodi 2009; Stahmer 2009).
- *Thirdly*, some of these references also contain studies of the concept of culture in disciplines other than cultural studies, such as technology (cf. Parodi 2009) or economics (cf. Hübner 2009).

Studies of the concept of culture and its variations over time, in my mind, clearly show the historical development of cultural thinking, the challenges it confronted, and the way in which concepts may be opposed to each other. A few of these opposites will be listed below. Culture can be

- thought of in a very broad (comprehensive) sense or in a narrower sense (relating to a specific cultural phenomenon);
- considered an absolute constant of mankind or expressed in relative or relational terms;
- described as a historical constant or as a phenomenon permanently changing;
- seen as something concrete existing in the world, or else as "something not to be discovered" in the world in concrete terms;
- something permeating all our actions or something to be found only in specific areas of action or practice;
- sketched as a culture of what exists or also as a culture of what does not exist, i.e. a culture of things not existing;
- considered both a precondition and a result of our actions according to the principle of the hen and the egg;

- seen as describing an active achievement (a cultural act) or a phenomenon always preceding such actions;
- deliberately reflected upon or describe a subconscious phenomenon;
- considered something which can be influenced (deliberately) or something existing independent of our actions, something which cannot be influenced or queried;
- considered mouldable or immutable;
- laid down permanently (as a taboo) or subject to negotiation;
- in need of permanent adaptation (by the trial-and-error model) or constitute a habit all people can learn;
- -discussed as theory or practice;
- considered a subjective or an objective phenomenon;
- declared part of the internal glue holding society together, in the absence of which society would disintegrate, or considered something without which we could well live, something replaceable;
- regarded as something creating unity or rather as something which permanently gives rise to differences.

A similarly contradictory pattern is shown by cultural differences. They can relate to very different dimensions, very close and very distant ones (recognizable within any social culture, for instance in the differences between genders or generations or between different societies), and mostly give rise to the question whether different cultures should be treated neutral with respect to value, or whether upgrading or downgrading is permitted.

The list above, which was compiled from the Proceedings of the 9th Weimar Colloquy of 2008, shows that these are contradictions, but that it is easily possible to cite reasons for the respective poles and regard them as plausible. Obviously, it is not possible in this case to decide in accordance with concepts of logic; instead, we are more inclined to resort to answers allowing both aspects of the contradiction (roughly in the "that depends" or "both and" modes).

This allows a number of important findings to be derived:

- *Firstly*: Culture seems to be ambiguous, sometimes stubbornly stable and then, again, flexible, relative (considered in constants of time and space), it can be modified, influenced, even eradicated, as our history has demonstrated repeatedly, and yet again and again comes back as a cultural asset long thought to be forgotten. It generally tends to establish hierarchies of differences and, at the same time, to want to negate them, all of which can have a meaning or no meaning.
- *Secondly*: If these different arguments can apply to culture, culture obviously cannot be considered in a logical and linear sense. The only alternative available seems to be dialectics. This makes culture a dialectic phenomenon, a stable anchor *and* a procedural event, a precondition *and* a result of our existence, an uncon-

scious anthropological fundamental constant of mankind *and* also a cultural achievement of our species which can be reflected upon and which can be shaped. This idea will be taken up again below.

2 The Concept of Culture in the Context of the Sustainability Debate

The papers dealing with the concept of culture from a sustainability point of view provided me with many interesting aspects, but also left me slightly confused in the face of several contradictions and dichotomies.

- *Firstly*: *Culture as an inexistent or abstract, at any rate unspecific, dimension of sustainability*. Jürgen Kopfmüller, after a detailed analysis of a variety of national (especially German) and international documents about sustainability and sustainable development, respectively, arrives at the astounding conclusion that matters of culture either do not exist in these contexts at all or, where they exist,[1] more often postulate abstract values than give any indications of their practical implementation (cf. Kopfmüller 2009, pp. 27f.). This refers to the divergence between abstract norms and empirical, practical usefulness in this concept. Immanuel Kant circumscribed this phenomenon by the term "regulative ideas" which "would never be of any constitutive use" (cf. Kant 1974, p. 565; cf. also Heintel 2000). Peter Heintel, recurring to Kant, emphasized the dual character and its purpose with respect to various values of our society. Accordingly, abstract norms must always be preserved as such for use as general indicators for our specific actions. At the same time, specific actions can be considered specific forms of their implementation and can be measured accordingly. Consequently, regulative ideas are guidelines for orientation which must not be given up as such; they serve as individual and collective backdrops for reflecting and verifying what is wanted by society and what has been achieved in practice by comparison (cf. Heintel 2000).
- *Secondly: Culture in contrast to the specific implementation of sustainable development*. Kopfmüller mentions another interesting phenomenon: In referring to a study, "Brot für die Welt" ("Bread for the World"), he quotes the "cultural helplessness" term which, in that context, primarily relates to the question how cultural societal patterns can prevent sustainable aspects from taking effect (cf. Kopfmüller 2009, p. 27). In this concept, culture can be seen as a programme pre-

1 Culture occasionally is established as an individual pillar, for instance, by the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, or, together with education, considered a cross sectional matter, such as in the final report by the Committee of Inquiry of the 13th German Federal Parliament about "Protecting Man and the Environment" (cf. Kopfmüller 2009, pp. 25ff.).

venting or, at least, contradicting sustainability. The same idea is taken up by other authors, for instance when asking why there have been discussions about sustainability and presentations of potentials of sustainable development for such a long time while, on the other hand, so little progress can be perceived in the same matter, which makes them feel that we seem to be living in a non-sustainable culture (cf. Krainer/Trattnigg 2007). However, if sustainability and culture initially are considered conflicting phenomena, this again is based on a concept of culture considered largely stable, evoking the question how processes of cultural change could be initiated.

- *Thirdly: Preserving culture is sustainable and non-sustainable at the same time*. No less contradictory is the attempt to preserve cultural assets sustainably, if one follows the ideas proposed by Caroline Y. Robertson-von Trotha who shows how environmental problems on the one hand, and problematic historical re-interpretations on the other hand make the protection and preservation of sites of historical importance a rather dubious affair (cf. Robertson-von Trotha 2009).

Reading these studies once again shows that we are surrounded by a large number of contradictions when dealing with the subject of culture as well as that of sustainability. As far as sustainability is concerned, it should be added that most ideal concepts, which can be taken from the classical three-pillar model of the sustainability debate (ecological, economic, social), can also contradict each other or describe internal areas of tension of sustainability (cf. Krainer et al. 2009).

It is not surprising, therefore, that many authors find the sustainability concept difficult enough as it is and suggest that one should not complicate matters by including the concept of culture. However, this is precisely what we had in mind, and so we will continue along this line.

3 Culture in a Conflict among Scientific Disciplines

We still know very little about the different meanings of culture in different scientific disciplines and the consequences this could have for an interdisciplinary discourse (which seems to be absolutely imperative in the light of the topic of sustainability as well as that of culture). For instance, what does an economist mean by "culture", and what is the meaning, in the otherwise seemingly rational world of the science of money and the markets, of such terms as economic *culture*, corporate *culture*, or market *culture*? What is the meaning of clamouring for a change of these cultures? What does an engineer mean by speaking about culture and referring to *technological cultures,* what is in her mind when she thinks about "culture of technology?" What do scientists mean by referring to "culture" and talking, for instance, about bacterial *cultures* whose pure *cultures* are of special importance? What kind of culture is referred

to by plant sociologists speaking of plant *cultures*? What do students of the Vienna University of Soil Culture mean by culture when discussing *aquaculture*? What culture is the subject of their studies of *cultural* technology? What cultures are meant by universities suddenly planning to introduce quality *culture* in their ranks? Are they really intimating that universities had neither quality nor culture before?

I dare say that almost all sciences incorporate a concept of culture. At the same time, I dare doubt that members of different disciplines even remotely mean the same thing when referring to culture. I am unable to estimate what we would gain by knowing what scientists say, think, feel when they speak of culture; I think this kind of dialogue, of interdisciplinary and thus intercultural learning could always be interesting. I also guess that this could be used to generate other interesting areas of contradiction (for instance, when considering the difference between cultures artificially generated or grown by people in a laboratory and those in which we ourselves live, which we are).

However, I think it is just as important at this point to draw attention to different *science cultures* which, because of very different fundamental axioms, elect very different approaches to their studies and, consequently, also have very different ways of interfering with social connections, with very different consequences and highly divergent outcomes and results. Scientific methods not only reflect criteria of a technically or scientifically "correct" approach, but are also expressions of a certain concept of the world which also includes cultural dimensions. Those who think they could understand the world and its innermost connections by decomposing that world into the smallest possible parts, per se think that world different from somebody who feels able, at best, to fathom it by observation. Those working in laboratories and, in a way, inviting the outside world into those labs (or reproducing it artificially), are exposed to a different working culture than those who operate "in the field", hoping to find the outside world there (in a virgin state, if possible). Those who dig in the ground to collect old cultural assets want to reconstruct past culture by present findings; those who therapeutically encourage individuals to remember their own past in order to better be able to shape their present, place hope in an individual change which, frequently, implies the change of certain patterns in the lives of people; and what are patterns of life other than phenomena of a culture of life? Those whose study and search for technical innovations, as a rule (and despite knowing extensive debates about technology assessment) initially do not ask for their potential cultural implications but tend to consider technical development something which is neutral in terms of value, and has better or worse consequences only as a result of the "right" or "wrong" use by others. Depending on how sciences see the world, or want to understand it, they design the appropriate methods for doing so. Whether they measure, decompose, produce experimental setups, resort to the "sources," test, write opinions, try out designs, observe, interview, draft questionnaires – in doing so, they always constitute a culture

of research and science which is not without impact on the "objects of research" – be they inorganic or organic in nature, animals, or persons.

Different science cultures also are reflected in very different publication cultures and guidelines, be they monographs or articles for journals, written in national languages or the dominating science language, English, written for a scientific readership or for the general public.

Another important cultural topic within the sciences stems from the question whether work is carried out in a disciplinary, interdisciplinary, or transdisciplinary fashion, with interdisciplinary, in my mind, meaning co-operation among various sciences on one topic, while transdisciplinary means conducting research in a joint effort with practitioners in the respective research area. In both cases, co-operative ventures are started which are not always easy to manage. Interdisciplinary work requires communication across disciplines, which does not arise automatically (because all too often the meaning of concepts is too divergent, and methodological ideas are too heterogeneous, etc.). Co-operation in research processes with practitioners allows participative research processes to be conducted from which both sides, science and practice, can learn, but also takes careful processes to ensure a meeting of minds and build up trust, confidence, and a spirit of co-operation (cf. Ukowitz 2006).

As so many different dimensions of culture can be discerned in the sciences, how then can science be seriously assumed to define, or at least describe exactly, what is meant by culture? Let me again formulate the problem as a paradox: Sciences are expected to be institutions at the same time *influencing* and *understanding* culture. They are supposed to explain the phenomenon in the most comprehensive fashion possible although only very few have learned to look comprehensively enough (otherwise there would not be any frontiers of disciplines). And there is still hope that, being neutral agencies, they would stand a better chance of looking through structures of cultural value.

However, this also evidences that the different science cultures will have to be studied in greater detail with respect to their consequences in terms of sustainability and sustainability research, and that another topic to be discussed is the existence of science cultures with respect to our topic, where they match, and where they contradict each other.

4 Comments on Culture as an Integral Part of Human Existence

The question what is characteristic of man in contradistinction to nature, for instance, has been raised repeatedly in history and is not without difficulties because, for plausible reasons, there are some who want the line separating nature and culture to be

removed, which is why they are against such polarizing divisions as explained, for instance, by Oliver Parodi (cf. Parodi 2009, pp. 55f.). Even more difficult is the question what distinguishes people from others especially where differences are established on the basis of cultural evaluations in an effort to upgrade some cultures and downgrade others. There are still too vivid memories of regimes declaring one group superhuman and another group subhuman, and not hesitating to destroy other cultures. Yet, I think it is also problematic to not mention any differences and deny those difficulties which become apparent again and again in the "clash of civilizations" (cf. Huntington 1998).

From my point of view, three things are indispensable to the existence of human beings as cultural beings:

- *Firstly,* the ability to communicate on the basis of symbols. This alone allows agreements to be reached and fulfilled. This is closely related to the ability for social interaction, which is the definition of communication by Symbolic Interactionism as developed by Herbert Blumer after George Herbert Mead (cf. Blumer 2004). Now that we have learned from Paul Watzlawick and his colleagues that persons "are unable not to communicate", it is evident that communication has always been a part of human existence (cf. Watzlawick et al. 1980). My reason for emphasizing the ability for agreements is that, to my mind, the debates about sustainability, and the efforts to achieve it, again and again seem to revolve about the question how collective social agreements can be entered into which will make binding what is considered meaningful and sustainable.
- *Secondly*, I think the ability to reflect and the associated possibility to develop self-awareness are key human capabilities characterizing all human beings. To Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the ability to differentiate (relative to oneself and to others) is a major characteristic of distinction between humans and animals. This subject will be covered in greater detail below.
- *Thirdly,* I think the ability for social control and control of social subsystems, respectively, on the basis of reflection and collective decision-making constitutes an enormous potential on the road to a culture of sustainability. Although this ability still seems to be in its infancy, it does represent a potential rooted in human beings and collectives. This can already be observed in specific expressions of civil society, also in the broader debates about good governance, it was observed within the framework of a five-year mediation procedure about the Vienna-Schwechat airport (cf. Falk et al. 2006). Modern societies are more and more looking for new ways to solve conflicts, but also for participative decision-making structures enabling as many members of society as possible to contribute to decisions, the outcomes of which are going to affect them in the future.

And now for some problem areas associated with the question of culture as a prerequisite of human existence. Globally, it is seen very quickly that we have to do with

very different traditions (I deliberately do not say abilities) of reflection. Right now, we can observe very different degrees of execution and exercise of reflection for various reasons, I think:

- *Firstly*, there are various historic traditions of tabooing which, to this day, have resulted in bans on reflection. From the Stone Age to our present time (found especially in tribes living under near-natural conditions), there have been implicit normative rules of co-existence which should not and must not be queried, because such querying of practiced rules, rights, and traditions could have a socially destabilizing effect. So, there are bans on reflection because of taboos.
- *Secondly,* we know of institutionalized bans on reflection and the associated long tradition of authoritarian governments or dictatorships. Let me illustrate this by the example of freedom of the press. The Freedom House NGO annually produces a report about the situation of freedom of the press in the world (cf. Freedom House 2009). The map of the world shows a colourful picture of states, with those marked green which have freedom of the press, while yellow denotes those which are referred to as partly free and where freedom of the press applies only partly, and then there are those countries, marked blue, where there is no freedom of the press. North America, Europe, and Australia by and large (though not completely) are marked green, South America is mostly yellow, Asia is mostly blue, while Africa can offer all of this, but mainly blue states. 2009 country statistics shows that 70 countries (36%) guarantee a system of freedom of the press, 61 states (31%) have a partly free system, while 64 states (33%) guarantee no freedom of the press. When related to the number of people living in those countries, the picture is even more drastic: Only 17% of the people worldwide live in countries where there is freedom of the press, while 41% live in systems with part freedom of the press, and 42% of the population must live without any free structures of the press. Now, freedom of the press is not necessarily an indication of any competence or tradition of reflection, but it is a symbol of the possibility to discuss publicly ideas about reflection, have discussions, establish a critical difference to regimes, or even take collective decisions, organize them, or participate in them. Where freedom of opinion is restricted, this mostly applies also to freedom of assembly which, as a rule, is important where people are to organize on their own.

In the light of all these aspects, I do not think too much of considering all cultures "equivalent" – not because I would like to refer to some as being higher and others as being lower, but because I feel that a deliberate decision in favor of specific cultures (such as a culture of sustainability) requires the freedom to make those decisions. Consequently, freedom can be described the way Immanuel Kant did, as "the key to explaining the autonomy of will" (Kant 1998, pp. 81f.), in order for a culture of sustainability to grow. Now, of course, the objection could be raised that especially authoritarian regimes have a much better chance to impose sustainability "top down".

This may be true. Apart from the fact that, right now, I know of very few totalitarian leaders expressing such commands, I also doubt whether sustainability ordered top down would have a long-term perspective. So far, the collapse of dictatorships as a rule resulted in nearly everything being discarded that had been in place before even if it had some positive aspects upon closer consideration (such as parts of a planned economy, which can quite well meet sustainability criteria).

5 About the Connection between Culture and Reflection

Kant wrote the famous sentence, "enlightenment is the escape of people from their self-inflicted dependence" (Kant 1977, p. 9). The philosopher started from the idea that human beings had a special ability, namely that of individual reflection (for which he demanded the freedom which Frederick II., Frederick the Great, ultimately offered), and he called conscience an "inner court of justice of a person" (cf. Kant 1997, p. 573). Hegel associated the difference between persons and nature directly with the human ability to reflect: "Humans are animals, but even in their animal functions they do not stay in a passive role, like animals, but become conscious of themselves, recognizing and elevating them, such as the process of digestion, to a science aware of itself. In this way, a person overcomes the barrier of his unreflected existence, implying that just because he knows that he is an animal he stops being an animal and turns this knowledge into spirit" (Hegel 1970b, p. 112).

Reflection is always a step establishing a difference. It allows for the possibility of querying actions, persons, organizations, institutions, conditions, states and, finally, themselves. This latter effect directly results in a related capability, namely that of self-observation. According to group dynamics findings, a successful change of action and reflection (self-observation) ultimately can result in the potential for self-control in groups. Although this does not yet explain how these capabilities can be transferred to larger collectives, it is safe to say that it is possible for people to learn something like autonomous control or self-control through reflection and self-observation of internal processes (above and beyond the existing individual competence). This ability for differentiation to me seems to be a particularly important core of what distinguishes man.

While Kant's interest still centred around individual enlightenment, the Klagenfurt philosopher and group dynamicist, Peter Heintel, asks how "collective autonomy" (Heintel 1998, p. 41) could be achieved, meaning precisely the ability for reflective self-control of collectives which is to go beyond the level of group information.

The connection with the subject of culture is easily explained: Those who credit persons with enlightened behaviour also credit them with the possibility to query anything and submit counter-designs (which, however, always need approval by the oth-

ers, if we think in democratic structures). However, this also means that it must be possible to observe, reflect upon, criticize, query and, if necessary, change culture and cultural patterns. If we consider culture only as a static, immutable phenomenon, we give up the possibility to regard it as our product, our design potential. That cultural patterns are not easily translated into terms of enlightenment, because they stem from historically grown cultural and, incidentally, religious practices, which have been handed down and are appreciated, and were able to survive partly only because they were not allowed to be reflected upon (see taboos), must be accepted, but does not mean that it would not be possible in principle. Consequently, reflection may shake some taboos, may have to be started with caution, may also be dangerous (at least to individuals), but it is not impossible.

And now for another aspect. A key basis of the ability for self-control is the ability to take conscious and reflected decisions in a collective. This is a subject which we have looked into in Klagenfurt for a longer time and in a very comprehensive way. The last part of this contribution is to be focused on this subject, although the statements made above give rise to more comprehensive concepts and consequences which, however, cannot be detailed for lack of space. Let us therefore turn to the question of how we take decisions.

6 On the Way to Sustainable Decisions

In a study about "knowledge and decision-making, informing and documentation, control, leadership, and co-operation" we conducted, a total of 43 qualitative interviews with entrepreneurs (most of them from small and medium-sized enterprises) were held in Carinthia in 2003 in which we also asked interviewees how they took decisions in their companies and organized the associated procedures. The very question, "how do you decide?", made the persons interviewed hesitate or stutter – not because decision-making was not part of their daily business, nor because there had been no clear decision-making structures in their companies. Most of them simply had never thought about this problem. We decide on numerous questions every day, have acquired routines in doing so and obviously are not used to thinking about how we do it – both individually and collectively.

What emerged from these interviews were mainly two poles of decision-making in business: To one group, decisions are a main duty of management (i.e. themselves): *"Well, I set out the basic criteria and then I say: 'Now, Mr. Production Manger, you see how you can produce those quantities!'"* was a characteristic quotation of that group. The members of the other group see decision-making more as a process at various levels of management (sometimes up to involving all staff members). In that case, the duty of management would be to ensure the organization of these processes:

"Ultimately it is efficient because, if a decision is supported by all, the objective will be reached in a much better and easier way", said one representative of that at view. Another difference we were able to see was that between the so-called "rational decisions", mostly based on key performance indicators, and the so-called "gut feeling" decisions. The latter, as we learned in this study, are in no way irrational decisions but are made mostly on the basis of the broad horizon of experience of people. Incidentally, the entrepreneurs consistently referred to personnel and investment decisions as those most difficult to make (cf. Heintel et al. 2004, p. 27).

Decision-making can be associated with a variety of difficulties, some of them very grave. A few of them will be briefly mentioned below (cf. Heintel 1986; Krainer 2007):

- Decisions must always be taken about open points (otherwise no decision would be necessary).
- Deciding always means inclusion and exclusion, means to decide in favour of something and against something else.
- Decisions include the need to move from uncertainty and indeterminacy to certainty and determination.
- At the same time, the correctness of the decision also remains open, needs continuous observation and, where necessary, revision.
- Good decisions take time; in actual fact, however, decisions in a company must very often be taken under strong pressure of time.
- Decisions frequently include risks. Where the consequences of decisions are incalculable, risk assessment is particularly difficult, which is why decisions about major investments probably are so hard to make.

It is also evident that decisions do not arrive out of the blue, i.e. that they must be made by us. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that they do not constitute facts on which there is no going back, i.e. as a rule, they can also be modified (even if some of them cannot be reversed).

As far as matters of sustainability are concerned, the following questions must be raised:

- How can decision-making processes be established which allow as many stakeholders as possible to participate in decisions (in bringing about those decisions)?
- How can these processes also be designed in such a way that they will incorporate criteria of sustainability?
- How can sustainable decisions be made which keep open the possibility of quick revision of wrong decisions (see biofuel)?

It has been found meaningful to distinguish first between decisions resulting from a decision-making process, and decision-making as an action. I treated this subject in more detail elsewhere (cf. Krainer 2007); here are some extracts:

- Decisions are sustainable if, in the process of decision-making, all stakeholders stand a chance to be heard, understood, and taken into account, when decisions can be taken in such a way that conflicting interests can be balanced out in those decisions and the outcome is such that all stakeholders can (just) live with them.
- Decisions have sustainable effects if their implementation is ensured and their execution is subjected to regular inspection (by those affected by them), i.e. when there is a possibility to adapt them to changed conditions and new challenges or query them as a matter of principle.
- As a rule, decisions require looking for a balance. Aristotle, more than 2000 years ago, proposed a procedure which can be found under the term of Mesotes doctrine, i.e. doctrine of the Golden Mean, in his Nicomachean Ethics. Aristotle considered it not meaningful to solve the problem arithmetically instead of looking for a position in the middle to be determined in the light of the situation and adapted to the circumstances (cf. Aristotle 1995, p. 43).

Most situations in which we have difficulties taking decisions are those in which conflicts become apparent. The subject of sustainability is full of such points. As a matter of principle, conflicts are necessary, meaningful, and good. We learn from conflicts, most of which are based on unresolvable contradictions. This stems from a comprehensive theory of contradictions which cannot be discussed in greater detail at this point (cf. Krainer/Heintel 2010). The basic assumption is that all relevant subjects we have to decide upon do not offer unambiguous decisions along the lines of "right or wrong". In most cases, good arguments can be found for doing one thing and leaving the other and vice versa. This can be said also of all requirements of sustainable development. In every case, interests and lobbies can be found which hold different views, pursue different objectives which, at a closer look, also cannot be rejected offhand. Or could we treat those countries which have just got started on their way towards achieving a certain level of prosperity, on which we have been resting for a long time already, by forbidding them seriously to want to reach that prosperity (even if it is evident that that would be associated with extremely negative impacts on the environment)?

Also international climate conferences clearly show the conflicts existing in this field. Those who want to be re-elected in their own countries cannot afford to make too many promises; those who have already been elected, cannot always guarantee that they will be able to turn their own intentions into political majorities at home.

And even where such conflicts are fed into a consensus procedure in an effort to strike a balance, it can be seen that the road to consensus is hard to go. We therefore should not suffer any naïve delusions, hoping for insight into the superior normative knowledge of others, even if all stakeholders are fully convinced that they represent the ethically "right" position.

Between 2001 and 2005, we had an opportunity to accompany, as researchers, the largest mediation procedure so far known in the literature. It was held at the Vienna-Schwechat airport; negotiations dealt with the construction of a third take-off and landing strip as well as innumerable measures alleviating the impact on the population nearby. On the whole, some 60 stakeholders took part in a permanent fight for decisions based on economic interests, on the one hand (construction of a third take-off and landing strip), and private cares and concerns, on the other hand (noise pollution, environmental subjects), and faced the tremendous challenge of having to take decisions which will impact the next generation (cf. Falk et al. 2006). Merely to illustrate by one example the contradictions negotiated there: One position held was that future young generations should be given chances of mobility (i.e. build the strip), while the opposite position was that natural resources had to be protected and preserved for coming generations (i.e. not build the strip). That there were some arguments in favour of both points is evident. Judged by today's standards, the future will be for mobility, while a future worth living will be achievable only by protecting resources.

7 A Sustainable Culture is a Deliberate Decision-making Culture

As a summary of my presentation I would like to offer the following ideas: As a result of the many findings from the field of the sustainability movement, but also from accompanying research projects, I have increasing doubt that sustainable development will arise all by itself. This is contradicted not only by too many powerful interests; undoubtedly, it is also contradicted by the current dominating value concepts and cultural patterns, accurately described by Heintel as "new era model" (cf. Heintel 2004), which either support, or stem from, a dominance of the economic-technical model. As I consider culture a phenomenon which can be reflected upon, shaped, and modified, my thinking is primarily about the question how the way there can be started. This requires, first of all, to find out who has to decide whether, and which ways of, sustainable development will be opened in the future and how, other than the classical representative structures by elected representatives of the people, decision-making processes can be established in which representatives of various sustainability perspectives can agree on measures striking a balance. Many proposals towards this end have been made and some first steps in participation procedures, all of which should be utilized, are being tested in many places. However, further downstream, it should be clarified who is responsible for monitoring the decisions made and for their evaluation. This undoubtedly will result in new roles both for those bearing government responsibility and for the members of the civil society, sciences, etc.

In a nutshell: To me, demanding, initiating, and organizing binding participative decision-making procedures constitutes the greatest potential for fighting the cultural conflict between sustainable and non-sustainable lifestyles, sustainable and non-sustainable development, sustainable and non-sustainable changes, and bring them into a meaningful balance enabling, where possible, all stakeholders to (at least just) support the decisions made.

A brief personal footnote: Several colleagues rejected the concept of "cultural sustainability" on grounds of their suspicion that this meant a new fourth, fifth, or sixth pillar or dimension of sustainability. Alternative proposals are being submitted in concepts such as "sustainability culture" or "culture of sustainability". From my point of view, this has a semantic connotation, but primarily also a pragmatic one, if we ask ourselves: What do we want to achieve by using these words, what do we want to indicate or do? I, for my part, subscribe to all those who are in favour of wanting to recognize by what cultural patterns non-sustainable behaviour functions, and how a switch can be made towards a culture embodying the opportunity to be sustainable, which I would then refer to as both cultural sustainability or sustainable culture.

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